MEETING SUMMARY

Massachusetts State Rail Plan Update Public Meeting
Union Station, Worcester
June 14, 2016

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) held a public meeting on June 14, 2016 at Union Station in Worcester to provide a status report on its effort to update the 2010 State Rail Plan and to receive input from members of the public. The updated rail plan will document the current state of the rail system, identify planned improvements and outline the Commonwealth's 20-year vision for the statewide rail system. Curtis Bradley, MassDOT's Project Manager, made a presentation to approximately 25 members of the public as well as 14 people who listened to the meeting on-line via WebEx.

The purpose of the rail plan is to:

- Set the Commonwealth's policy involving freight and passenger rail, including commuter rail operations.
- Establish policies, priorities and strategies to enhance rail services in the state that provide benefits to the public.
- To serve as the basis for public (federal and state) investment in rail within Massachusetts.
- Establish the means and mechanism to coordinate with adjoining states; private parties; and the federal government in projects of regional and national significance.

Mr. Bradley outlined six goals of the rail plan: 1) preserve and maintain the existing rail system; 2) accommodate economic and population growth; 3) ensure rail safety and security; 4) provide environmental stewardship; 5) enhance connectivity among all modes and networks; and 6) expand rail service where there is demand.

Mr. Bradley outlined the Commonwealth's current passenger and freight rail system, ownership and usage. The existing network in Massachusetts consists of intercity, commuter, and freight rail services that are both privately and publicly-owned. Commuter rail operations are currently concentrated in Greater Boston and intercity and freight rail services exist throughout the state. The state rail system connects to service beyond its borders including other New England states and New York.

Massachusetts has one Class I railroad, five regional railroads and six short line railroads that carry freight. Amtrak and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) are the two major passenger rail operators in Massachusetts. The presentation concluded with a summary of the next steps for the planning team. By late summer/early fall, the team will identify a list of projects in accordance with the 20-year vision for rail as well as a four-year program for the near term. A Draft State Rail Plan Update Draft will be ready for review by late fall/early winter.

At the close of the presentation Mr. Bradley presided over a 45-minute public discussion session during which meeting attendees asked questions and provided comments. The following is a summary:

Palmer Rail Station: Seven individuals who identified themselves as representing a group, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, described their desire for passenger rail service to Palmer. They said:

- When will we see more east/west service?
- The state should move the Palmer rail stop up on the priority list as there is a real demand for this from the community.
- Rail service to Palmer is an economic justice issue.
- The infrastructure for rail – track and station – already exist in Palmer. Historically, Palmer has been the junction of seven railroads.
- A large number of people would benefit from rail service, not only in Palmer, but the surrounding towns.
- Palmer wants to tap into the opportunity of this plan. We don't want to miss out. We will follow this plan very closely.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission: Executive Director Tim Brennan stated that there are three rail initiatives that should be flagged in the plan.

- Short-term (1-3 years): Expand rail service on the Knowledge Corridor on a pilot basis. Currently there is only one train a day, the Vermonter.
- Mid-term: Continue to upgrade the New England Central Railroad line to accommodate 286,000-pound rail cars. Improving freight rail is important for the region.
- Long-term: Implement, over the next decade, eight round-trips a day between Boston-Springfield as outlined in the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative study.

Increase service to Western Massachusetts

- Better rail service to Boston would open up job opportunities for young people.
- Young people want to use transit rather than automobiles.
- The Mass Pike is not a viable travel option as it comes to a standstill most days.
- People in Western Massachusetts feel that the area has been left out for too long; the focus is always on Boston.

Vision:

- There is no 20-year vision, only projects and plans. What's the end goal? None of these projects are coming together at the end of the day to work seamlessly together. A plan cannot exist without a vision; nothing to guide the projects.
- No one is addressing the transportation needs around us.
- When looking at 20 year plans, we should look outside the current scope. Let's be innovative. Open up the vision as to where we can go with the future and technologies and look at the plan on a larger scale, looking at all modes of transportation, surface and air, for the state, country and the environment.

- Make sure our vision goes beyond our borders to include other states.
- I didn't get a real overview from the presentation about what was happening.

Additional comments:

- The Rail Plan should include a more comprehensive analysis of the overall economic benefits of rail for the state.
- Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is an important benefit of rail service.
- The North-South Rail Link project should be advanced.
- Reorganize the MPO structure so that decisions are not always focused on Boston.
- Maintain Track 61 near the Boston Convention Center and connection to South Boston.
- Include Diesel Multiple Unit rail service from Readville to Boston as a project.
- Purchase dual mode locomotives to provide MBTA more flexibility. This would enable MBTA access to other rail networks.

Scott Hamwey of the MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning noted that the Commonwealth sees the need to develop a vision but must consider that current financial resources will limit what projects can be implemented. He noted several projects that cost in the billions – the MBTA Green Line extension, the South Coast Rail project and the North-South Link, a rail tunnel between the two Boston rail stations - are all projects that have been identified for decades.

John Weston of HDR responded to a question about the Northern New England Intercity Initiative Study. He said the study has been finished and that it's in the final stages of review by the Federal Railroad Administration. The study report should be posted on the MassDOT website in July.

At the close of the meeting, Curtis Bradley provided his contact information and told the audience how they can stay in touch with the process, provide additional comments and ask questions.